Moral panic

Revision as of 23:18, 12 March 2022 by Libraryclerk0191 (talk | contribs) (→Quotes)
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A **moral panic** is a widespread feeling of fear, often an irrational one, that some evil person or thing threatens the values, interests, or well-being of a community or society. It is "the process of arousing social concern over an issue," usually perpetuated by moral entrepreneurs and the mass media, and exacerbated by politicians and lawmakers.

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File:Angel-Devil.jpg

The sociological and criminological concept known as moral panic offers valuable insights into how and why powerful social agents such as the news media and politicians deliberately create public concern or fear of an individual or group.

Quotes

- Public fear, and those responsible for creating or promoting it, are major topics of discussion these days. The sociological and criminological concept known as moral panic offers valuable insights into how and why **powerful social agents such as the news media and politicians deliberately create public concern or fear of an individual or group**. Moral panic has been defined as a situation in which public fears and state interventions greatly exceed the objective threat posed to society by a particular individual or group who is/are claimed to be responsible for creating the threat in the first place.
  - Moral Panic: Who Benefits From Public Fear? Moral panics maintain the status quo. Scott A. Bonn, (https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/wicked-deeds/201507/moral-panic-who-benefits-public-fear) *Psychology Today*, July 20, 2015

Moral panics arise when distorted mass media campaigns are used to create fear, reinforce stereotypes and exacerbate preexisting divisions in the world ~Scott A. Bonn

- Central to the moral panic concept is an argument that public concern or fear over an alleged social problem is mutually beneficial to state officials—that is, politicians and law enforcement authorities—and the news media. The relationship between state officials and the media is symbiotic in that politicians and law enforcement need communication channels to distribute their rhetoric and the media need tantalizing news content to attract a wide audience which, in turn, attracts advertisers... **Moral panics arise when distorted mass media campaigns are used to create fear, reinforce stereotypes and exacerbate preexisting divisions in the world... Finally, public hysteria over a perceived problem often results in the passing of legislation that is highly punitive, unnecessary, and serves to justify the agendas of those in positions of power and authority....** Politicians are....vital actors in a moral panic drama. As elected officials who must operate in the court of public opinion, politicians must present themselves as the protectors of the moral high ground in society. Similar to law enforcers, politicians have a sworn duty and moral obligation to protect society from folk devils when they arise.

- Moral Panic: Who Benefits From Public Fear? Moral panics maintain the status quo. Scott A. Bonn, (https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/wicked-deeds/201507/moral-panic-who-benefits-public-fear) *Psychology Today*, July 20, 2015

- **Moral panic is a situation in which media reporting has created a folk devil of a particular social group, and the public demand of the authorities that something is done about it. This expression of concern is described as a moral panic because it is based on an outraged sense of offense to public standards of behavior, though the information which prompts it is often limited and inaccurate.** Folk devils refer to a group whose common interest or activity has become stigmatized by society and becomes the target for adverse comments and behavior. The criminological and sociological concept known as moral panic offers valuable insight into why and how powerful social agents like the media create public concern...Moral panic is recognized in the sociology of deviance and crime as well as being related to the labeling theory of deviance.
  - Moral Panic and Folk Devils (Cohen 1972), By Mia Belle Frothingham, *Simply Psychology* (https://www.simplypsychology.org/folk-devils-and-moral-panics-cohen-1972.html), Oct 28, 2021

- You don't want to live in a country in which moral panics breakout regularly. By the way, moral panics diminish the people engage in them and hurt the people who don't. They're degrading. They're crazy. They're the opposite of what you want. You want to live in a country where wisdom and restraint and rational behavior and decency determine the outcomes not screaming. So for nearly two years, the shouting has not ended. Hysteria is now the official language of public discourse in the United States. That's not good for anyone except those benefiting from it... Who is benefitting? Anyone who lies for a living. The liars have perfect cover.
  - Tucker Carlson, Tucker Carlson explains how moral panics are destroying America, *The Post Millennial*, Mar 8, 2022

- Moral panic is... based on false or exaggerated perceptions or information that exceeds the actual threat society is facing. Moral panic is a widespread fear and often an irrational threat to society's values, interests, and safety. Typically, a moral panic is most likely perpetrated by the news media, most times engaged by politicians, and can result in increased social control.... moral panics arise when exaggerated and distorted mass media campaigns are used to create fear, reinforce stereotypes, and add tension to preexisting divisions based on race/ethnicity and social class... Politicians are vital actors in the moral panic drama. As elected officials operate in the stage of public opinion, they must present themselves as the protectors or heroes of the moral high ground in society...Moral panic can be centered around marginalized people in society due to race or ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class, or religion... moral panic can draw on known stereotypes and reinforce them while exacerbating the actual and perceived divisions and differences between communities and people.
  - Moral Panic and Folk Devils (Cohen 1972), By Mia Belle Frothingham, *Simply Psychology* (https://www.simplypsychology.org/folk-devils-and-moral-panics-cohen-1972.html), Oct 28, 2021
- Moral panic has become in current media discourse the inevitable outcome of any story involving 'youth': in the blogosphere, 'Won't someone think of the children!' — the imagined battle-cry of the faux-outraged columnist — is in danger of becoming the new Godwin's law'
  - Rebecca Coleman; Debra Ferreday (2011). "Reading Disorders: Online Suicide and the Death of Hope". *Hope and Feminist Theory*. Routledge. p. 99. ISBN 978-0-415-61852-6.

- If there is one thing history teaches us, it's that moments of shock are profoundly volatile. We either lose a whole lot of ground, get fleeced by elites, and pay the price for decades, or we win progressive victories that seemed impossible just a few weeks earlier. This is no time to lose our nerve... Instead of rescuing the dirty industries of the last century, we should be boosting the clean ones that will lead us into safety in the coming century (Green New Deal).
  - Naomi Klein, as quoted in 'We Know This Script': Naomi Klein Warns of 'Coronavirus Capitalism' in New Video Detailing Battle Before Us, by Jessica Corbett, *Common Dreams*, (17 March 2020)

- The very writers and journalists and deep thinkers who are institutionally responsible for describing what is happening in society have instead been roped into becoming contributors to today's moral panic. I expect

Fox News and Republican political strategists to create pseudo-issues to tap into the latent racism and fear of voters. But the people who run academic departments and write for *the Atlantic* and stroke their chins professionally inside the *New York Times* are supposed to be a little savvier than that. But they are not. They have chin-stroked themselves right into validating the idea that any of this bullshit is A Real Thing, just like their ancestors did when the best and brightest minds of last century validated Joe McCarthy's moral panic then.

- Moral Panics Work: On the poisonous inability to diagnose bullshit, Hamilton Nolan, *In These Times*, November 3, 2021

See also

- 2021–2022 Russo-Ukrainian crisis
- The Big lie
- Capitalism
- Corruption
- Corona Virus
- Deception
- Denial
- Fear
- Global catastrophic risk
- Hegemony
- Hysteria
- Insanity
- Mass media
- Military Industrial Complex
- Mutual assured destruction (MAD)
- Propaganda
- Psychology
- Reality
- Truth
- Tyranny

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